

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 1991 -- FOURTH LEGISLATIVE DAY**

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 1991**

**IN JOINT CONVENTION**

**GOVERNOR'S STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS**

The hour having arrived, set by House Joint Resolution No. 28, the Senate met with the House in Joint Convention.

The Joint Convention was called to order by Mr. Speaker Wilder, President of the Joint Convention.

On motion of Senator Darnell, the roll call of the Senate was dispensed with.

On motion of Representative Purcell, the roll call of the House was dispensed with.

Thereupon, the Clerk of the Senate read House Joint Resolution No. 28 authorizing the Joint Convention.

On motion, Representative Purcell moved that the President appoint a Committee composed of six (6) members from the Senate and six (6) members from the House to notify the Governor that the Joint Convention is in session and awaiting his arrival, which motion prevailed.

Mr. President Wilder appointed a Select Committee composed of Senators Crowe, Davis, Gilbert, Haynes, Jordan and O'Brien and Representatives Chiles, Crain, Davis (Cocke), Duer, Purcell and Ridgeway, who was appointed to serve as Chairman of this Committee.

Without objection, the Joint Convention recessed pending the arrival of the Governor.

The Joint Convention was called to order by President Wilder.

Without objection, the roll calls of the Senate and House were dispensed with.

Representative Purcell announced the Governor of the State of Tennessee at the entrance to the House.

President Wilder asked the committee to escort the Governor to please come forward.

President Wilder introduced the Honorable Ned McWherter, Governor of the State of Tennessee.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 1991 -- FOURTH LEGISLATIVE DAY

STATE OF THE STATE MESSAGE

Governor Ned McWherter

January 31, 1991

Governor Wilder, Speaker Naifeh, members of the General Assembly. To the distinguished members of the Supreme Court. To the Constitutional Officers and members of the Public Service Commission.

I ask today for your indulgence. The Governor's State of the State Message has historically been dedicated to a broad overview of the progress we have made and the challenges we confront. My request today, Mr. Speaker, is that you permit me to use this occasion to address what I believe will be the most serious discussion this body will face during the next four years.

Last May, several hundred people crowded into an old gymnasium tucked away in the hills of Hancock County. The night was hot, and there was no air conditioning. They propped the doors open with cinderblocks to get a breeze while people crowded in the bleachers near the stage.

Some of you who were with me that night -- Senator Lawson, Rep. Givens, Rep. Turner -- can probably recall many of the faces. It was more than the usual meeting of educators and elected officials. There were parents, grandparents, and children running in the aisles.

What I witnessed that night in Hancock County was a community that had come together united in a single purpose. They had come to tell their Governor they cared about their children and they cared about their schools.

It was a scene repeated in dozens of communities across Tennessee. In Red Bank, in Bearden, in Hohenwald, in Martin -- they came because they hoped this Administration and this General Assembly are prepared to make some historic changes in education.

I have no problem admitting to the Legislature what I told every teacher and parent I met. I am not an educator. I am not qualified to recommend how to organize a class or develop a curriculum.

But eighteen years in the General Assembly and four years as the Chief Executive have taught me something far greater. I have learned it is wrong to impose a program this important, and this far-reaching, without first seeking the advice of those whose lives will be affected.

I know from experience there is a wisdom among the people of Tennessee that surpasses anything we have in the agencies of state government. Some were surprised that I did not rush to present an education program. Others felt I was too deliberate or too cautious.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 1991 -- FOURTH LEGISLATIVE DAY**

If I was deliberate, it was because I wanted to listen closely to what the millions of working men and women across Tennessee think about our schools. We have discussed this issue with literally thousands of teachers. We have met with principals, superintendents, and school board members. Their advice and support have been invaluable.

But over the last several weeks, in the quiet of my study, I have tried to recall the emotions and priorities of the thousands of parents and neighbors who voiced their concerns and frustrations.

Restructuring an institution as large, as complex, and important as education is an intimidating task. In the face of such a difficult challenge, there are always those who want to believe that if we could only change a specific law or court ruling our problems would be solved.

On the other extreme, there are those convinced that improving the quality of our school requires little more than providing a massive infusion of new funding. Neither of these extremes expresses what I believe lies at the heart of our problem in education.

They say it different ways, but from the inner city to the rural county schools, the theme is remarkably the same.

The people tell us there are too many state rules and regulations. That there is a lack of adequate discipline. That there is a decline in parent involvement.

They say our academic standards have been allowed to fall. That our teachers have too much paperwork and are forced to sell candy to buy textbooks and computers.

They complain about a lack of accountability. They say people just don't seem to care about our schools like they used to.

Again, and again, and again, their concerns lead me to the same conclusion. What Tennesseans want us to do -- and the purpose to which I will dedicate the rest of my public service -- is to set about rebuilding our community schools.

The plan I offer to rebuild our community schools is based on two separate notions. First, I will not ask the Legislature to fund, and I will not ask the people of Tennessee to accept, any education plan that merely continues the way we have done things up to now. I will be asking you instead to help me bring about fundamental changes in the management, the standards, and the accountability of our schools.

Second, it is important for all of us to remember that a great deal of what needs to be done requires little or no additional money. Before we talk about money, I will insist that we first address some hard, common sense decisions that could transform the way we operate our schools.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 1991 -- FOURTH LEGISLATIVE DAY**

With this in mind, permit me to offer some proposals designed to convince Tennesseans that we are not talking about more of the same.

I will begin by recommending that we start returning control of education policy to local communities. I will recommend to the State Board of Education that they repeal 3,700 current rules and regulations that we believe are not justified. The number of water fountains, the size of the playground, and how many minutes you teach reading are decisions that can be made by the communities without the bureaucrats in Nashville.

As we return decision-making to the communities, we need to make absolutely clear who is responsible and who is accountable. I am recommending that all school boards be elected, and that school boards be responsible for establishing all policies. All school board members would receive training, and those that refuse would be removed from their positions.

I am recommending that the policies of the local school board be carried out by an appointed superintendent given full authority to manage the schools. All decisions regarding hiring, transfers, tenure and termination should be made only upon recommendation of the superintendent. In short, the superintendent would be the chief executive for the schools, and the superintendent would be held accountable by the board.

Within the school, I am recommending that the principal be given full authority to manage the assignments of faculty and students. Each principal would sign a performance contract with specific duties. The contract would be renewed based upon the performance of the principal and the evaluation of the superintendent.

As aggressive as these proposals might sound, we cannot rebuild our community schools unless we also take serious steps to bring parents back into the school. I am today asking the Legislature to authorize local boards of education to initiate programs of school-based decision-making. Under this program, decisions on management, curriculum, personnel and budget could receive the input of students, parents and teachers.

In addition to school-based decision-making, I am asking the Legislature to extend the school year by one day. In every school across Tennessee, this day would be devoted to meetings with parents who want to be more involved in the education of their children.

To the recommendations for local control and parent involvement, I am also asking the General Assembly to address in serious fashion the issue of accountability. More than any other issue, our willingness to provide greater accountability will determine public support for our efforts.

In brief summary, I recommend each of the following proposals for the Legislature's consideration.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 1991 -- FOURTH LEGISLATIVE DAY**

Every student would be tested each year to measure the educational "value added" over the previous year. The results of these tests would be evaluated annually to help determine the relative productivity of teachers, schools and systems.

The Department of Education would provide each October to the local media and local public officials a report on the progress of teachers, schools and systems. The report would include test scores, the drop-out rate, per capita spending and a listing of administrative costs.

Those systems that demonstrate improvement would receive incentive funding of up to five percent. Those systems that fail to meet minimum standards would be placed on probation. Continued poor performance could result in the removal of the superintendent and the local school board.

Having offered these proposals, I emphasize that the accountability of management cannot be separated from the accountability of our students. For too long, we have allowed too many of our students to coast through school. At least part of the blame lies in our reluctance to set higher expectations.

To this end, I recommend the following proposals to strengthen the academic quality of our schools.

That the number of required courses for high school graduation be increased from 11 to 13 to include more history and civics.

That the old eighth grade-level proficiency test for graduation be replaced by a new test that measures math, science, reading, writing, and social studies.

That we eliminate the general track diploma that allows students to slide through high school.

And finally, that we strengthen the vocational curriculum to make sure, our students have the skills needed by Tennessee industry.

Over the last few minutes, I have offered 17 recommendations that would help restore the spirit and quality of our community schools. Each of these 17 recommendations would represent a major change in the way we operate our schools. And each could be done without spending additional funds.

As we discuss the need for changes, we must also acknowledge that there are needed changes that will require more resources. If our children are to compete in a 21st Century economy, they will need a 21st Century classroom.

We need to be conservative and responsible. But we must be bold enough to do what needs to be done.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 1991 -- FOURTH LEGISLATIVE DAY**

To help every student have a fair start in school, I am recommending to the Legislature that we establish a program of mandatory kindergarten.

To give our children more personal attention, I am recommending that we lower the class size to an average of 20 students in grades K-4.

To end the practice of classroom fundraising, I am recommending that every teacher in grades K-4 be given \$200, with no strings attached, to be used for classroom materials.

To give teachers the chance to remove disruptive students, I am recommending that we require an alternative school in every local system.

To attract and retain good teachers, I am recommending that we provide more competitive salaries.

And to give our students the technology skills they will need in the 21st Century, I am recommending we make sure every school will be equipped with adequate numbers of textbooks and computers.

These recommendations will have a cost, though not nearly as high as the figure some have quoted.

In a few days, I will present to the General Assembly, and to the people of Tennessee, my proposals for the funding of the 21st Century Classroom. But it is appropriate to repeat today what I have said for twelve months.

I announced first my recommendations to restructure education to emphasize a point on which I will not compromise. Before we ask the people of Tennessee to give us more money, I want the men and women of this legislature to be comfortable with the goals and content of our education plan.

First the plan. Then the money.

I close by trying in the best way I know to explain in simple terms why it is critical that we turn our attention to education.

Less than two weeks ago, I had the privilege to participate in the announcement of the decision by Nissan to locate a new industry in Franklin County. Nissan's capital investment will be the second largest in Tennessee history. The 1,000 new jobs will improve the quality of life in Franklin County for generations to come.

Part of the reason Nissan chose Tennessee over Alabama was a belief that our state is ready to make a major commitment to an education system that promises a qualified labor force for the 21st Century.

It is a commitment that will take courage. We know what needs to be done. We know the consequences for our children if we fail to act.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 1991 -- FOURTH LEGISLATIVE DAY**

Before I leave office, I want to return to that gymnasium in Hancock County. I want to climb up on that stage and tell them that they were not forgotten.

That we made the commitment. That we met the challenge. And that we set about rebuilding their community school.

Thank you.

Mr. President Wilder relinquished the Chair to Mr. Speaker Naifeh, as President of the Joint Convention.

The purpose for which the Joint Convention was called having been accomplished, Mr. President Naifeh declared the Joint Convention dissolved.